

Fallowed fields and areas that are temporarily out of production offer excellent opportunities to try some wildlife-friendly practices with fast results. The fact that these areas may only be available for a short time is not a significant drawback for wildlife; pheasants, waterfowl, song birds and other species are quick to take advantage of these productive habitats. Your planting schedule and current regulations for your crops may allow you to use fallowed fields to provide nesting habitat; you may also be able to flood these areas to offer spring duck brood habitat. If you're interested in some of these practices, but have concerns regarding endangered species, seek advice from your local fish and game biologist; ask about the new program being developed by wildlife and farming organizations. You may also wish to check with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Army Corps of Engineers, and your water provider, as appropriate.



## Avoid discing fallowed fields

### What to do:

Instead of discing and applying herbicides to fallow fields to control weeds, let vegetation reestablish while the fields are idle. Experiment with a small area; you may find that your farming operation can tolerate some weedy areas. Consider the proximity of neighboring farms when choosing these areas. When undiscd fields are near public roads or buildings, you may need to disc fire breaks or take other fire precaution measures.

If water is available, you can produce a lush growth of smartweed or other wildlife foods on undiscd fields by irrigating them once or twice during late spring and summer, as needed. Consider using water drained from recently planted rice or other crops in nearby fields. Undiscd fields will attract rodent-eating birds of prey. You may entice the hawks or owls by providing roosting perches in the fields or installing nest boxes. If, however, your objective is to

use fallowed areas for duck or pheasant nesting or brood areas, avoid attracting hawks or owls as they will prey on the ducklings and chicks.

### Benefits:

- Provides a large area with vegetation that offers seasonal food and cover for ducks, pheasants, song birds, and other species.
- Attracts northern harriers, short-eared owls, and other birds of prey that help reduce rodent populations throughout the farm.
- Reduces the labor and expense associated with routine discing.
- Reduces wind and water erosion.
- Can increase organic matter in soil, which can improve water infiltration, moisture retention, and overall soil fertility.
- May only have a minimal effect on your bottom line, depending on your operation.



Natural vegetation growing on this fallowed field provides food, cover, and nesting habitat for many species.